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ABSTRACT

Thirteen years of data from the National Crime Survey were analyzed to examine the characteristics of motor vehicle theft, to identify trends during the past 13 years, and to determine who are most likely to be victims of motor vehicle theft. All motor vehicle thefts reported to the National Crime Survey from 1973 through 1985 were examined. Between 1973 and 1985, there were 12,338,000 motor vehicles thefts in the United States, and 7,097,000 attempted thefts. The number of motor vehicles stolen declined 33% during the 1973-1985 period, from 9 to 6 per 1,000 registered vehicles. Motor vehicle thefts, whether completed or attempted, most often took place at night; vehicles were most often parked near the victim's home, in noncommercial parking lots, or on the street. A household member was present in about nine percent of all motor vehicle thefts, and in three percent the offender either threatened or physically attacked the victim. Stolen motor vehicles were recovered in 62% of the incidents. Almost 9 in 10 completed motor vehicle thefts were reported to the police. Blacks, Hispanics, households headed by persons under age 25, people living in multiple-dwelling units, residents of central cities, and low-income households were among those most likely to be victimized by motor vehicle theft. Those least likely to experience a motor vehicle theft included individuals age 55 and older, people who owned their own homes, and those living in rural areas. (NB)

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Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report

Motor Vehicle Theft

by
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March 1988

Between 1973 and 1985, 12,338,000 motor vehicles were stolen in the United States, or 949,100 annually, according to the National Crime Survey (NCS). There were another 7,097,000 attempted thefts, or 545,900 annually. This was a rate of 7 completed thefts and 4 attempted thefts each year for every 1,000 registered motor vehicles in the Nation.

Other findings include:

- The number of motor vehicles stolen declined 33% during the 1973-85 period, from 9 to 6 per 1,000 registered vehicles.
- Motor vehicle thefts, whether completed or attempted, most often took place at night; vehicles were most often parked near the victim's home, in noncommercial parking lots, or on the street.
- A household member was present in about 9% of all motor vehicle theft incidents, and in 3% the offender either threatened or physically attacked the victim.
- Attempted thefts were more likely than completed thefts to occur at night, have a household member present, result in property damage, and be reported to police by someone outside the household.
- Stolen motor vehicles were recovered in 62% of the incidents.
- Almost 9 in 10 completed motor vehicle thefts were reported to police. The percentage of thefts reported increased as the value of the stolen property increased.

Motor vehicle theft is of great concern to most Americans. The cost of this crime to victims and to society as a whole is considerable. Losses from motor vehicle thefts during the 1973-85 period were almost \$29 billion before reimbursements by insurance companies.

This Special Report, based on 13 years of data from the National Crime Survey, examines the characteristics of motor vehicle theft, presents trends during the past 13 years, and analyzes who are most likely to be its victims. We trust that this report will be useful to policymakers, legislators, and criminal justice practitioners as well as others who seek to protect the public from the impact of this crime.

Steven R. Schlesinger
Director

- In half of all completed motor vehicle thefts, property worth \$2,455 or more was stolen; in more than 1 in 4 thefts, property worth at least \$5,000 was stolen; and in 1 in 10 the loss was \$10,000 or more.
- Losses from completed motor vehicle thefts after recoveries and reimbursements by insurance companies amounted to \$16.1 billion, or \$1.2 billion annually.
- Blacks, Hispanics, households headed by persons under age 25, people living in multiple-dwelling units, residents of central cities, and low-income households were among those most likely to be victimized by motor vehicle theft.

- Those least likely to experience a motor vehicle theft included those 55 and older, people who owned their own homes, and those living in rural areas.

Introduction

Motor vehicles are the most frequently used form of transportation in the United States. Of \$350 billion spent by households on transportation in 1985, 92%, or more than \$320 billion, was spent for the purchase and maintenance of motor vehicles.¹ Spending for motor vehicles amounted to 12% of all personal consumption expenditures. Because most people rely on motor vehicles for transportation, when a vehicle is stolen, its theft causes inconvenience to household members, time is often lost from work, and household spending is affected.

This report examines all motor vehicle thefts reported to the National Crime Survey from 1973 through 1985. The crime consists of stealing a motor vehicle, taking it without permission, or attempting to take it. Motor vehicles falling within the scope of this crime are those legally allowed as a means of transportation on most roads and highways, including cars, trucks or vans, and motorcycles. Boats, airplanes, snowmobiles, and all-terrain vehicles are excluded.

Motor vehicle theft is classified in the NCS as a household crime because the vehicle is usually jointly owned, and the impact of a theft affects all members of a household. Some households, however, such as those with high incomes, own more vehicles than others. This may result in a greater risk of being victimized by a motor vehicle theft, though the risk to each vehicle may be lower than for households that

¹Statistical Abstract of the United States: 1987 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1986), table 710.

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Table 1. Motor vehicle thefts, 1973-85

	Motor vehicle thefts		
	Total	Completed	Attempted
Average annual number	1,495,000	949,100	545,900
Average annual rate per 1,000 households	18.6	11.8	6.8
Average annual rate per 1,000 registered motor vehicles	11.3	7.2	4.1
Percent of all incidents	100%	63%	37%

Table 2. Time and place of occurrence of motor vehicle thefts, 1973-85

Time and place of occurrence	Percent of motor vehicle thefts		
	Total	Completed	Attempted
Time of occurrence	100%	100%	100%
Day	25	29	19
Night	61	59	66
Dawn/dusk	3	3	2
Don't know/not ascertained	11	10	12
Place of occurrence	100%	100%	100%
Near home	37	35	41
In noncommercial parking lot	19	20	19
On street	16	16	15
In apartment parking lot	8	7	10
At or in own home, vacation home, or detached building on property	6	7	4
At, in, or near friend's home	6	7	4
In commercial parking lot	3	4	3
Inside school or on school property	1	1	1
Inside restaurant, commercial building, office, or factory, or on public transportation	1	1	—
In park, field, other	2	2	2

Note: Percentages may not add to total because of rounding and omission of "don't

know" and "not ascertained" categories from the place of occurrence display.
—Less than .5%.

own fewer. Consequently, this report presents motor vehicle theft rates both for every 1,000 households and for every 1,000 registered motor vehicles. Reported rates include both completed and attempted thefts.

Between 1973 and 1985, 12,338,000 motor vehicles were stolen, an average of 949,100 motor vehicles per year (table 1). There were attempts to steal another 7,097,000 vehicles, or 545,900 annually. This is equivalent to 18.6 motor vehicle thefts each year for every 1,000 households in the United States (11.8 completed and 6.8 attempted). For every 1,000 registered motor vehicles in the Nation, 11.3 completed or attempted thefts occurred.

Motor vehicle thefts were usually successful; in almost two-thirds of the incidents the vehicle was taken. Motor vehicle theft, however, is the least common type of household crime. In 1985, for example, there were about 98 household larcenies and 63 burglaries per 1,000 households.²

²See *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1985*, NCJ-104273, May 1987, table 2.

Trends

Between 1973 and 1985 completed motor vehicle thefts declined by 21%, from 13.3 to 10.5 per 1,000 households. Following the same pattern were rates for completed thefts reported to police, for motor vehicles returned to their owners, and for those incidents both reported to police and involving recovered vehicles (figure 1).

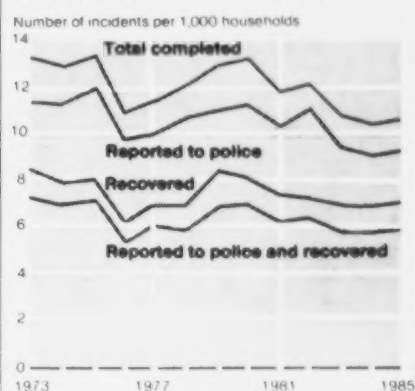
Household rates for completed thefts remained stable from 1973 through 1975 and then fell between 1975 and 1976. They rose from 1976 to 1980, although the climb was somewhat less dramatic for completed thefts reported to police. Rates declined again from 1980 to 1983, although the fall was only somewhat significant for vehicles that were both reported to police and returned to their owners. Thereafter, rates remained stable.

Rates for attempted motor vehicle thefts declined 25% over the period, with an increase between 1980 and 1981 and a decrease between 1981 and 1982. Rates for attempted thefts reported to police also decreased over the period, with a large decline between 1976 and 1978.

Completed motor vehicle theft rates based on the number of registered mo-

Completed and attempted motor vehicle thefts per 1,000 households, 1973-85

Completed motor vehicle thefts



Attempted motor vehicle thefts

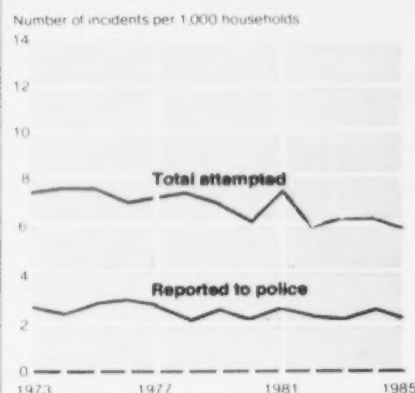


Figure 1

Completed and attempted motor vehicle thefts per 1,000 registered motor vehicles, 1973-85

Completed and attempted motor vehicle thefts

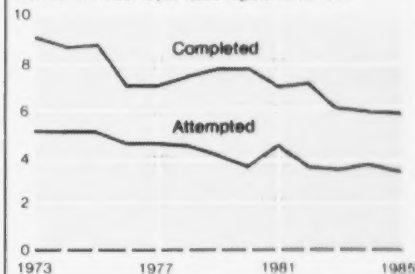


Figure 2

tor vehicles also declined between 1973 and 1985, from 9 to 6 per 1,000 vehicles—a 33% decrease (figure 2). There was, however, less volatility for rates based on registered vehicles than for household rates. Attempts also decreased over the entire period, by 36%,

Table 3. Presence of a household member during a motor vehicle theft, 1973-85

	Motor vehicle theft		
	Total	Completed	Attempted
Percent of incidents with a household member present	9%	7%	13%
Percent of those who experienced:			
Total	100%	100%	100%
Force			
Attack	16	19	14
Threat	18	19	17
No force	66	62	69

although there was an increase between 1980 and 1981.

Motor vehicles may either be stolen for "joy-riding," the unauthorized use of vehicles usually by juveniles, or they may be stolen by professional thieves for resale or export or to be dismantled for parts. Vehicles stolen for joy-riding are usually abandoned for the owner to recover. Allegations of an increasing percentage of "professional" theft activity have been cited in committee reports of the U.S. Congress.³ NCS data indicate, however, that a fairly stable percentage of vehicles were recovered from year to year over the 1973-85 period, probably attributable to joy-riding. This would also suggest fairly constant proportions of motor vehicle thefts by professional thieves.

Crime characteristics

Both completed and attempted motor vehicle thefts occurred disproportionately at night, although a higher proportion of successful than unsuccessful thefts took place during the day (table 2). About 1 in 10 victims did not know when the crime occurred.

Both completed and attempted motor vehicle thefts took place primarily while the vehicle was outside and unattended. Almost three-quarters took place while the vehicle was parked near the owner's home, on the street, or in a noncommercial parking lot. In 7% of completed thefts and 4% of attempts the vehicle was in a garage at home, and 3-4% took place in commercial lots, where attendants were more likely to be working.

Household members were at the immediate scene of the crime during 9% of all motor vehicle thefts (table 3). They were more likely to be present at

³See Senate Report 98-478 of the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation for S. 1400 and House Report 98-1087 of the Committee on Energy and Commerce for H.R. 8257. Subsequently, the Motor Vehicle Theft Law Enforcement Act of 1984 (Public Law 98-547) was passed.

Table 4. Type of vehicle and other property stolen during motor vehicle thefts, 1973-85

Items stolen	Percent of motor vehicle thefts		
	Total	Completed	Attempted
Type of vehicle			
Car	79%	76%	85%
Other	21	24	15
Other property			
Part of vehicle	4%	4%	5%
Cash, purse, wallet	4	6	1
Small appliances	3	4	1
Silver, jewelry, bicycle, gun	1	2	—
Clothes, books, other	13	20	2

Note: More than one kind of other property may have been stolen.
—Less than .5%.

an attempt, where they might have prevented or interrupted the theft, than at a completed theft.

When household members were present, they were either attacked or threatened in roughly a third of the incidents. A somewhat higher proportion of victims of completed than attempted motor vehicle thefts experienced some type of force.

In 4.5% of completed or attempted motor vehicle thefts, a household burglary was also committed; in 3% there was a robbery, which involves direct confrontation between the victim and the offender; and in fewer than .1% there was a rape.

The vehicle stolen in 76% of completed thefts was a car; in the other quarter it was a truck, van, or motorcycle (table 4). Among attempts, cars were more likely to be the targets than among completed thefts (85%).

In 25% of completed motor vehicle thefts, other objects were also taken. The items included cash, purses, wallets, stereos, and other small appliances. Property in addition to the

Table 5. Completed motor vehicle thefts reported to an insurance company, by whether vehicle was recovered, 1973-85

Vehicle recovery	Percent of completed motor vehicle thefts reported to insurance companies		
	Total	Reported	Not Reported
Total	100%	47%	52%
Recovered	100	40	59
Not recovered	100	58	41

Note: Percentages may not add to 100% due to rounding and omission of "don't know" and "not ascertained" categories from table display.

vehicle was more likely to be taken when the incident involved another crime. In 47% of the incidents in which another crime was also committed, additional property was stolen, compared with 24% for incidents in which there was only a motor vehicle theft.

Vehicles were recovered in 62% of completed motor vehicle thefts. They were recovered by police in 62% of such incidents and by a household member in 18%, and they were returned by the offender in 14%.⁴

A household member reported the theft of a vehicle to an insurance company in almost 1 out of every 2 cases (table 5). Insurance companies were more likely to be informed when the vehicle was not returned to the owner than when it was recovered.

Days lost from work

At least one household member took time from work in 17% of motor vehicle thefts (table 6). A higher percentage lost work-time when the vehicle was taken than when an attempt was made (23% vs. 7%). Moreover, a higher percentage of victims took more than 1 day off when the vehicle was actually stolen.

⁴Data on the source of recovery are from 1979 through 1985.

Table 6. Motor vehicle thefts resulting in days lost from work, by whether reported to police, 1973-85

Reported to police	Percent of motor vehicle thefts resulting in days lost from work			
	Total	Less than 1 day	1-5 days	6 or more days
All motor vehicle thefts	17%	6%	9%	2%
Reported	23	8	12	2
Not reported	5	2	2	—
Completed	23%	8%	13%	3%
Reported	25	9	14	3
Not reported	8	3	4	*
Attempted	7%	4%	3%	—
Reported	13	7	5	—
Not reported	4	2	2	—

—Less than .5%.

*Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

Table 7. Total value of theft losses, damages, insurance payments, and recoveries in completed motor vehicle thefts, 1973-85

	Value	
	Constant 1985 dollars	At time of theft
Total losses	\$52,052,729,200	\$37,418,930,000
Thefts		
Property	50,686,864,900	36,515,472,600
Cash	93,203,200	74,319,200
Damages	1,272,661,100	829,138,200
Recoveries		
Property	23,277,692,500	16,082,047,500
Cash	14,659,400	8,661,100
Insurance payments	12,611,956,800	9,307,428,700
Net loss	16,148,420,400	12,020,792,800

Note: Amounts may not add to totals because of rounding.

Household members also were more likely to miss work and be absent for longer periods of time when the crime was reported to police than when it was not. This was true both for completed and attempted thefts, although completed thefts resulted in greater lost time than attempted thefts, whether or not the police were informed.

Value of losses and recoveries

Total gross losses for all property stolen amounted to \$50.7 billion in 1985 dollars for the 13 years, with another \$1.3 billion in damages to other property (table 7). Owners recovered property worth almost half the value of what was stolen (\$23.3 billion) and received an additional \$12.6 billion in insurance payments. When these payments and recoveries were included, victims suffered a net loss of \$16.1 billion, or approximately \$1.2 billion annually.

In half of all motor vehicle thefts, property worth \$2,455 or more was taken; in more than 1 in 4 thefts, property worth at least \$5,000 was taken; and in 1 in 10 the loss was \$10,000 or more (table 8).

The average loss from motor vehicle thefts was \$4,116. After property was recovered and insurance reimbursements were made, it was \$1,309. Half of all motor vehicle thefts, however, resulted in a net loss of \$242 or less (median loss).

When asked how they decided the value of stolen property, 49% of respondents said it was a personal estimate of the current value, 26% gave the original cost, 12% the insur-

⁵Data are from 1979 through 1985.

Table 8. Value of stolen property and net losses for completed motor vehicle thefts, 1973-85

Value of loss	Percent of completed motor vehicle thefts by:		
	Gross loss ^a	Net loss ^b before insurance reimbursement	Net loss ^b after insurance reimbursement
Total	100%	100%	100%
0	—	24%	32%
\$1-249	3	11	14
\$250-999	20	17	18
\$1,000-1,999	18	13	11
\$2,000-4,999	25	16	11
\$5,000-9,999	17	9	5
\$10,000 and above	11	6	3
Mean dollar loss	\$4,116	\$2,331	\$1,309
Median dollar loss	\$2,455	\$756	\$242

Note: Value is based on constant 1985 dollars. Percentages may not add to total because of rounding and omission of "don't know" and "not ascertained" categories from table display.
—Less than .5%.

^aGross loss is the value of the property and cash stolen.
^bNet loss is the value of the property and cash stolen and any damages incurred minus the value of recovered property.

ance estimate, 12% the replacement cost, and 1% a police estimate.⁵

When property was returned to owners and damages included with the value of stolen property, 15% of households lost property worth \$5,000 or more, although 24% also said they did not experience any loss. When insurance payments were also included, in almost a third of the incidents the household did not experience any monetary loss, and in 7% losses exceeded \$5,000.

Households incurred damages other than to stolen property in 22% of completed motor vehicle thefts and in 56% of attempts. Although further damage was less likely to occur in completed motor vehicle thefts than attempts, when property was damaged during an actual theft, it was more likely to be expensive to repair. In 32% of completed incidents and in 13% of attempts, the cost to repair damages was \$250 or more (table 9).

Table 9. Value of damages incurred during motor vehicle thefts, 1973-85

Value of damages	Percent of motor vehicle thefts with damages	
	Completed	Attempted
Total	100%	100%
0	14%	4%
\$1-249	31	60
\$250-999	19	11
\$1,000 and above	13	2
Don't know/not ascertained	23	23

Note: Value is based on constant 1985 dollars.

Table 10. Motor vehicle thefts reported to police, 1973-85

Reported to police	Percent of motor vehicle thefts		
	Total	Completed	Attempted
Total	100%	100%	100%
Reported	68%	87%	36%
Not reported	31	12	63
Don't know/not ascertained	1	1	1

Table 11. Completed motor vehicle thefts reported to police, by value of loss, 1973-85

Value of loss	Percent of completed motor vehicle thefts reported to police by:		
	Gross loss ^a	Net loss ^b before insurance reimbursement	Net loss ^b after insurance reimbursement
0	—	77%	82%
\$1-249	62%	80	83
\$250-999	82	88	89
\$1,000-1,999	88	95	95
\$2,000-4,999	91	96	95
\$5,000 and above	93	97	95

Note: Value is based on constant 1985 dollars.
—Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

^aGross loss is the value of property and cash stolen.
^bNet loss is the value of property and cash stolen and any damages incurred minus the value of recovered property.

Reporting to police

When a motor vehicle was stolen, 87% of the incidents were reported to police; when an attempt was made, a much lower percentage (36%) were reported (table 10). The police were informed by a household member in 88% of the cases in which a completed motor vehicle theft was reported to police. Someone other than a household member reported the incident in a higher proportion of attempted than completed thefts (15% vs. 7%). The police themselves discovered the crime in 4% of cases, and they recovered the vehicle in 91% of those incidents.⁶

The value of the property taken influenced the percentage of motor vehicle thefts reported to the police. When the property was worth less than \$250 in 1985 dollars, 62% were reported (table 11). The percentage reported to police increased as the value of the gross property loss increased--when property worth \$5,000 or more was stolen, 93% were reported.

Net loss, that is, the value of property when damages, insurance payments, and returns of stolen property were included, also influenced reporting to police but not by as great an extent, probably because the recovery of property and insurance payments occurred after incidents were reported to police. Police were informed in 83% of cases when net losses were less than \$250 and in 95% of cases when they were \$5,000 or more.

When a motor vehicle theft was reported to an insurance company, it was also reported to police, whether or not the property was recovered (table 12). When the theft was not reported to an insurance company, a lower percentage of the thefts were reported to police (77%). Of these, a higher proportion were reported to police when the vehicle was not returned to the owner than when it was recovered (81% vs. 75%).

⁶Data are from 1979 through 1985.

Table 12. Completed motor vehicle thefts reported to police, by whether vehicle was recovered and whether theft was reported to insurance company, 1973-85

Reported to insurance company	Percent of completed motor vehicle thefts reported to police when vehicle was:		
	Total	Recovered	Not recovered
Total	87%	85%	91%
Yes	99	99	99
No	77	75	81

Table 13. Reasons for reporting motor vehicle thefts to police, 1979-85

Reason for reporting	Percent of motor vehicle thefts reported to police by respondents*		
	Total	Completed	Attempted
To recover property	68%	82%	2%
To punish the offender	23	23	23
To keep it from happening again	22	18	43
To collect insurance	19	19	19
It was victim's duty	16	15	24
To stop or prevent this incident from occurring	13	10	26
It was a crime	6	5	9
There was evidence or proof	5	5	7
Need for help after incident	1	1	1
Other	5	4	8
Don't know/not ascertained	2	2	2

Note: Reasons for reporting add to more than 100% because more than one reason may have been given.
*Only respondents who themselves report the incident to police are asked why they reported it.

When asked why they reported completed motor vehicle thefts to police, more than 80% of the victims said it was because they wanted to recover their property (table 13). Respondents were somewhat more likely to indicate a desire to punish the offender (23%) than to keep it from happening again (18%) or to collect insurance (19%).

When an attempt was made to steal a vehicle, the reason for reporting it to the police that was mentioned most frequently was to keep it from happening again (43%). Each of three reasons received a positive response from about a quarter of respondents: to stop or prevent the incident from occurring, because it was their duty, or to punish the offender.

When the police were not informed of a completed theft, the reason given by almost 4 in 10 respondents was that they had taken care of it themselves (table 14). This reason is often given when respondents do not want to report juvenile offenders to police, preferring

to discuss it with parents, guardians, or young offenders themselves. The second most common reason for not reporting an offense to the police was that the vehicle was recovered.

Respondents did not report attempted thefts most frequently because the offender was unsuccessful (29%), because they lacked proof (23%), or because they thought it was not important enough (18%).

Table 14. Reasons for not reporting motor vehicle thefts to police, 1979-85

Reason for not reporting	Percent of motor vehicle thefts not reported to police		
	Total	Completed	Attempted
Object recovered or offender unsuccessful	28%	25%	29%
Lack of proof	19	7	23
Respondent did not think it was important enough	15	6	18
Private or personal matter or taken care of personally	14	38	5
Respondent did not realize crime happened until later	10	5	12
Police wouldn't think it was important enough	9	4	11
Police would be inefficient or ineffective	7	4	8
It was reported to someone else	4	5	4
Respondent did not want to take the time	3	1	4
Property difficult to recover	1	2	—
Fear of reprisal	1	1	—
Other	9	14	7
Don't know/not ascertained	1	1	2

Note: Reasons for not reporting add to more than 100% because more than one reason may have been given.
—Less than .5%.

Victims

Motor vehicle theft rates were higher for black households than for white households (table 15). Rates based on the number of vehicles owned showed an even bigger difference for these two groups. Rates based on both numbers of households and numbers of registered motor vehicles were also higher for Hispanic than non-Hispanic households.

Among different age groups, younger households experienced the highest theft rates and the elderly the lowest both for households and for registered vehicles. As the age of the household head increased, the likelihood of motor vehicle theft decreased.

Regarding the marital status of the household head, widowed persons experienced the lowest household rates, but their risk per vehicle was equal to that of married couples. The separated, divorced, and never married had the highest rates either per household or per motor vehicle.

Households with incomes of \$10,000 or more had higher household rates of motor vehicle theft than those with incomes of less than \$10,000. However, when vehicle ownership was taken into account, those with the lowest incomes had the highest rates, and rates decreased as income increased.

One-person households experienced lower household rates of motor vehicle theft than larger households, with rates increasing as the size of the household increased. However, when rates were based on the number of vehicles owned, one-person households had the highest rates, followed by households with six or more members; two-person households had the lowest rates.

The low household rate for one-person households was primarily for women living alone because they owned relatively few vehicles. Households consisting of two unmarried persons age 12 and older had comparatively high household rates, followed by single males and married couples with children or others living with them. Basing rates on the number of vehicles owned, married couples living alone had the lowest rates, followed by married couples with others living with them and women living alone. Single adults with children under 12, single males, and unmarried two-person households had the highest rates among these categories of households.

Table 15. Motor vehicle theft victimization rates, by selected household characteristics, 1973-85

Characteristics	Motor vehicle theft victimization rate per:		Number of vehicles per household
	1,000 households	1,000 registered motor vehicles	
Total	18.6	11.3	1.7
Race of household head			
White	17.7	10.3	1.7
Black	26.1	24.2	1.1
Other	19.0	12.6	1.5
Ethnicity of household head			
Hispanic	29.8	21.6	1.4
Non-Hispanic	18.1	10.8	1.7
Age of household head			
12-19	40.0	36.4	1.1
20-24	35.0	22.9	1.5
25-29	26.9	16.2	1.7
30-39	20.3	11.2	1.8
40-54	21.2	10.2	2.1
55-64	13.1	7.6	1.7
65 and older	5.9	5.7	1.0
Marital status of household head			
Married	18.3	9.1	2.0
Widowed	7.5	8.9	.8
Separated/divorced	24.8	20.9	1.2
Never married	25.4	22.2	1.1
Income of household*			
Less than \$10,000	13.9	13.9	1.0
\$10,000-19,999	19.4	11.2	1.7
\$20,000-29,999	18.9	8.9	2.1
\$30,000 and above	19.7	8.2	2.4
Not ascertained	19.3	11.5	1.7
Number of household members			
1	12.8	15.6	.8
2	16.6	10.1	1.6
3-5	22.3	10.8	2.1
6 or more	28.8	13.4	2.2
Household structure*			
One male	21.2	18.0	1.2
One female	7.5	10.9	.7
One adult with children under 12	17.3	21.6	.8
Married couple	12.1	6.6	1.8
Married couple with children, other adults, etc.	20.6	9.0	2.3
Two persons, both 12 and older, who are not married	25.9	17.6	1.5
Other	32.1	17.8	1.8
Home ownership			
Own	14.7	7.7	1.9
Rent	25.7	21.7	1.2
Number of housing units			
1	15.5	8.1	1.9
2	25.4	20.8	1.2
3 or more	27.6	27.2	1.0
Mobile home, other	14.1	9.3	1.5
Residence			
Central city	27.2	21.0	1.3
Suburb	19.5	10.7	1.8
Nonmetropolitan area	9.3	5.2	1.8

*Data are for 1979-85.

Those who owned their homes had lower rates than renters. Among different types of household dwellings, those living in mobile homes, rooming houses, and hotels had the lowest household rates, followed by households in single-family dwellings, which had somewhat higher rates. When motor vehicle ownership was considered, households in single-family units had the lowest rates. Those living in structures with three or more housing units had the highest rates either per household or per motor vehicle.

Residents of central cities had higher rates than either suburban or nonmetropolitan area residents when calculated either for households or for registered vehicles; those in nonmetropolitan areas had the lowest.

Table 16. Motor vehicle theft victimization rates for selected household characteristics, by income group, 1979-85

Characteristics	Motor vehicle theft victimization rate by income groups per:							
	1,000 households				1,000 registered motor vehicles			
	Less than \$10,000	\$10,000-19,999	\$20,000-29,999	\$30,000 and above	Less than \$10,000	\$10,000-19,999	\$20,000-29,999	\$30,000 and above
Race of household head								
White	13.5	17.7	17.3	18.6	12.4	9.9	8.1	7.7
Black	15.7	34.3	40.4	44.6	23.7	25.1	22.5	20.2
Other	12.5	24.6	21.4	15.7	14.2	16.2	11.1	7.0
Ethnicity of household head								
Hispanic	20.4	32.7	37.8	34.2	23.8	20.4	18.6	14.3
Non-Hispanic	13.4	18.6	18.1	19.3	13.2	10.6	8.5	8.0
Age of household head								
12-19	32.3	64.2	—	—	33.3	35.4	—	—
20-24	29.7	36.7	31.9	35.6	24.0	20.7	15.1	15.1
25-29	22.8	25.9	22.8	28.2	19.9	14.9	11.4	13.0
30-39	19.8	20.2	18.5	18.6	17.5	11.4	9.0	8.4
40-54	15.4	21.2	20.3	21.6	13.0	10.8	8.6	8.1
55-64	8.6	12.2	13.6	15.6	7.9	7.0	6.4	6.4
65 and older	4.4	5.6	10.3	9.0	5.8	4.0	6.0	4.6
Marital status of household head								
Married	14.4	17.3	17.2	18.6	9.7	8.8	7.5	7.4
Widowed	4.7	9.8	12.8	11.8	7.8	7.9	7.9	6.2
Separated/divorced	18.8	24.9	28.7	31.7	22.5	17.6	16.9	16.5
Never married	19.8	28.6	24.9	26.2	21.7	20.6	16.2	15.0
Number of household members								
1	8.9	16.6	18.7	21.2	14.5	14.9	14.3	14.6
2	12.8	16.6	17.0	16.2	10.5	9.6	8.4	7.3
3-5	23.1	22.4	19.0	20.1	17.2	11.0	8.1	7.7
6 or more	20.3	28.6	29.9	36.7	15.1	13.0	11.5	12.4
Household structure*								
One male	17.0	23.6	23.9	23.8	20.0	18.0	16.2	15.3
One female	5.4	10.9	11.2	15.1	10.6	11.6	10.5	12.7
One adult with children under 12	14.4	16.5	33.9	17.5	25.8	14.5	25.2	10.7
Married couple	8.3	12.2	13.0	14.8	6.0	6.9	6.3	6.7
Married couple with children, other adults, etc.	21.2	20.5	19.2	20.5	12.6	9.7	8.0	7.7
Two persons, both 12 and older, who are not married	20.6	30.0	29.7	24.2	19.0	18.1	15.2	11.1
Other	27.5	36.9	30.8	43.5	21.5	18.8	13.2	16.0
Home ownership								
Own	7.2	13.8	15.5	17.4	5.9	7.1	6.9	7.0
Rent	19.1	28.1	29.6	34.4	23.1	19.3	17.1	17.8
Number of housing units								
1	9.6	14.9	15.6	17.4	8.1	7.6	6.9	6.9
2	19.8	27.1	29.9	34.9	24.9	19.0	17.0	17.2
3 or more	19.5	31.2	32.1	34.6	28.9	25.6	21.8	21.0
Mobile home, other	11.8	13.0	14.7	20.6	10.6	6.8	6.3	8.0
Residence								
Central city	19.9	30.0	30.8	30.7	27.9	21.2	16.9	14.2
Suburb	15.6	19.9	17.7	18.5	14.6	11.3	8.3	7.6
Nonmetropolitan area	7.3	9.5	10.3	10.8	5.9	4.7	4.3	4.2

—Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

*Data are for 1979-85.

Income and risk of motor vehicle theft

In general, for each demographic group examined, motor vehicle theft rates per 1,000 households increased as household income rose. Those households with income under \$10,000 per year generally had lower theft rates than those with incomes of \$10,000 or more (table 16). In a few cases, however, the risk of a household experiencing a motor vehicle theft was more or less stable regardless of household income: Households headed by persons under 40 years old, those consisting of 3-5 members, and married couples with others living with them did not experi-

ence an increasing risk of motor vehicle theft as their income increased.

Black households with annual incomes of \$20,000 or more had among the highest overall theft rates (more than 40 vehicles stolen per 1,000 households each year).

When ownership of motor vehicles was taken into account, theft rates generally decreased as the income level of each group increased. However, rates were more or less stable as income increased for blacks, households headed by persons 55 or older, widowed persons, households with six or more

members, females living alone, and married couples.

The average number of vehicles owned by each household was greater for wealthier households, putting them at greater risk, although their risk of losing any one vehicle was less than for those with incomes of under \$10,000. Only among homeowners did motor vehicle theft rates increase slightly as household income rose—from 5.9 per 1,000 motor vehicles for households with incomes under \$10,000 to about 7 for households with incomes of more than \$10,000.

Place of residence

For most of the demographic groups examined, motor vehicle theft rates for households were highest when they were located in central cities, lower in suburbs, and lowest in rural or nonmetropolitan areas (table 17). For Hispanics, those not living with a spouse, those living in buildings with three or more housing units, and single adults with children under 12, the risk to the household of a motor vehicle theft was the same whether it was located in a city or a suburb. When vehicle ownership was taken into account, however, members of these groups who lived in cities had higher rates than their suburban counterparts.

Among rural residents, households headed by persons under 20 had the greatest likelihood of having a motor vehicle stolen (31 thefts per 1,000 households each year). In urban and suburban areas the household rate of motor vehicle theft for this group was not significantly higher than for older age groups. The theft rate per registered vehicle, however, was highest for the youngest households whether they resided in cities, suburbs, or rural areas.

Race

Among the various types of households, motor vehicle theft rates based on the number of households were generally higher for blacks than for whites (table 18). In several cases, however, the opposite was true: Blacks had the same or lower rates than whites who were under 25; separated, divorced, or never married; living in households with six or more members; single adults with children; renters; or living in mobile homes, hotels, or rooming houses.

Based on the number of registered vehicles, however, blacks consistently had higher rates than whites unless they lived in rural areas or in mobile homes or hotels. In these two cases, whites and blacks had similar rates of motor vehicle theft.

Members of other racial groups such as American Indians or Asians generally had theft rates that were closer to those of white households than black households. Households of other races located in rural areas, however, had theft rates that were higher than those of either their black or white counterparts. This was true whether theft rates were measured per household or per vehicle.

Table 17. Motor vehicle theft victimization rates for selected household characteristics, by residence, 1973-85

Characteristics	Motor vehicle theft victimization rate by place of residence per:					
	1,000 households			1,000 registered motor vehicles		
	Central city	Suburb	Nonmetropolitan area	Central city	Suburb	Nonmetropolitan area
Race of household head						
White	25.9	19.1	9.5	18.5	10.3	5.1
Black	32.2	27.6	6.9	34.7	19.5	5.9
Other	23.4	15.1	16.1	18.7	8.6	10.0
Ethnicity of household head						
Hispanic	33.7	31.2	12.9	30.1	19.0	7.7
Non-Hispanic	26.6	19.0	9.2	20.3	10.4	5.1
Age of household head						
12-19	48.4	44.0	30.9	47.9	37.0	28.3
20-24	43.5	40.6	19.4	33.8	24.4	11.7
25-29	38.4	27.2	12.8	28.6	15.2	6.9
30-39	30.0	19.6	11.2	21.1	10.2	5.5
40-54	31.3	21.7	10.9	19.4	9.7	4.8
55-64	20.6	13.8	5.3	15.2	7.3	2.9
65 and older	9.6	6.1	2.5	12.3	5.4	2.2
Marital status of household head						
Married	30.7	18.5	8.9	17.9	8.8	4.2
Widowed	10.4	9.1	3.2	16.1	9.5	3.5
Separated/divorced	29.3	27.0	14.5	31.1	19.4	11.0
Never married	28.6	28.3	15.8	30.2	21.1	12.6
Number of household members						
1	17.1	13.8	6.0	25.1	14.8	6.7
2	25.6	17.4	7.4	18.8	10.0	4.2
3-5	34.7	22.2	12.0	20.6	10.1	5.4
6 or more	43.4	30.3	14.2	25.2	12.8	6.3
Household structure*						
One male	27.9	20.9	12.1	28.9	16.0	9.2
One female	10.0	8.3	3.6	17.6	10.7	4.8
One adult with children under 12	17.9	21.3	11.6	31.8	21.5	12.0
Married couple	21.1	13.2	4.4	13.5	7.0	2.2
Married couple with children, other adults, etc.	37.0	19.0	11.3	18.7	8.0	4.7
Two persons, both 12 and older, who are not married	32.5	27.5	14.4	26.5	16.4	9.2
Other	38.8	36.2	16.4	27.2	17.3	8.4
Home ownership						
Own	23.6	15.7	7.6	14.0	7.8	3.8
Rent	30.6	28.3	13.8	33.2	20.4	10.0
Number of housing units						
1	24.2	16.8	8.4	14.2	8.3	4.4
2	31.4	23.2	14.2	29.6	16.4	10.8
3 or more	29.8	29.6	12.5	36.1	23.4	10.9
Mobile home, other	26.8	16.2	10.9	28.0	11.0	6.7

*Data are for 1979-85.

Table 18. Motor vehicle theft victimization rates for selected household characteristics, by race, 1973-85

Characteristics	Motor vehicle theft victimization rate by race per:					
	1,000 households			1,000 registered motor vehicles		
	White	Black	Other ^a	White	Black	Other ^a
Age of household head						
12-19	41.9	26.4	—	35.7	49.9	—
20-24	35.1	34.6	33.2	21.5	42.3	27.0
25-29	26.1	34.1	18.1	14.7	33.1	13.5
30-39	19.1	28.6	18.6	10.1	24.0	12.1
40-54	20.1	30.3	17.1	9.3	23.1	9.5
55-64	12.1	22.0	15.2	6.7	19.2	9.3
65 and older	5.5	8.8	17.0	5.2	12.2	16.4
Marital status of household head						
Married	17.2	31.9	17.4	8.4	19.9	10.0
Widowed	6.7	12.3	—	7.8	20.4	—
Separated/divorced	24.8	24.7	30.4	18.9	32.8	28.4
Never married	25.5	25.6	20.8	20.6	39.8	19.5
Number of household members						
1	11.8	20.0	17.3	13.7	34.8	22.4
2	15.6	25.7	21.9	9.2	24.4	16.2
3-5	21.5	29.5	17.8	9.9	22.3	10.2
6 or more	29.2	28.2	20.6	12.4	19.9	10.4
Home ownership						
Own	13.7	26.3	16.6	7.0	17.2	8.3
Rent	25.8	25.9	21.0	20.1	36.1	19.5
Household structure^b						
One male	19.5	31.5	21.1	15.8	37.3	21.8
One female	6.8	12.6	—	9.4	29.6	—
One adult with children under 12	18.7	15.1	0	19.3	33.9	0
Married couple	11.1	28.4	14.2	6.0	19.3	9.3
Married couple with children, other adults, etc.	19.4	33.7	18.0	8.2	18.6	9.4
Two persons, both 12 and older, who are not married	25.6	27.6	22.4	16.0	31.8	17.1
Other	35.1	24.9	—	16.7	25.0	—
Number of housing units						
1	14.7	23.4	16.1	7.5	16.9	8.2
2	24.5	30.3	19.4	18.9	38.4	15.7
3 or more	27.2	29.9	23.6	24.9	45.2	24.5
Mobile home, other	14.2	12.4	—	9.1	11.8	—
Residence						
Central city	25.9	32.2	23.4	18.5	34.7	18.7
Suburb	19.1	27.6	15.1	10.3	19.5	8.6
Nonmetropolitan area	9.4	6.9	16.1	5.1	5.9	10.0

—Too few cases to obtain statistically reliable data.

^aIncludes American Indians, Alaskan Natives, Asians, and Pacific Islanders.

^bData are for 1979-85.

Methodology

Data for this report include all motor vehicle thefts reported to the NCS from 1973 through 1985, except for those tables in which variables were available only from 1979, when a revised questionnaire was introduced. In total there were 19,434,000 incidents, 12,338,000 completed thefts and 7,097,000 attempts. Motor vehicle thefts were weighted to represent both households and incidents, since for crimes defined as household crimes, the household as a whole is considered the victim, with one household per theft.

Estimates in this report are higher than those in annual NCS publications because motor vehicle thefts occurring during other crimes and series crimes were included. If a vehicle is stolen or an attempt is made during a rape, robbery, or burglary, the theft or attempt is included as part of the other crime in other NCS publications. Approximately 7.7% of motor vehicle thefts reported here also involved a rape, robbery, or burglary.

Series crimes, that is, three or more similar criminal incidents about which the victim is unable to provide separate details, were counted as three incidents each. Series crimes constituted 3.6% of motor vehicle thefts in this report.

All comparisons in this report are significant at the 95% confidence level or above, unless modified by such words as "somewhat," in which case the relationship is significant at the 90% confidence level. For further details on significance testing, see *Criminal Victimization in the United States, 1985*, NCJ-104273, May 1987, Appendix III.

The Assistant Attorney General, Office of Justice Programs, coordinates the activities of the following program offices and bureaus: the Bureau of Justice Statistics, National Institute of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, and the Office for Victims of Crime.

Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Reports are prepared principally by BJS staff. This report was written by Caroline Wolf Harlow. Richard W. Dodge provided statistical review, and Gertrude Thomas provided statistical assistance. Frank D. Balog edited the report. Marilyn Marbrook, publications unit chief, administered report production, assisted by Tina Dorsey, Jeanne Harris, Yvonne Shields, and Christina Roberts.

March 1988, NCJ-109978

Crime and Older Americans

Information Package

- Are older Americans more likely to be victims of crime than younger age groups?
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- 1984 (final report), NCJ-100435, 5/86
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*U.S., G.P.O., 1988-202-045:80035

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